

**TESTIMONY OF EDWARD J HOORT**  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**  
**LEGAL SERVICES OF EASTERN MICHIGAN**  
**IN SUPPORT OF HB 4366**

I am Edward J Hoort, and I am the Executive Director of Legal Services of Eastern Michigan. We are a non-profit law firm providing civil legal services to poor persons in a 14 county area in Eastern Michigan, stretching from Port Huron to Clare County. I have 18 lawyers in the organization, and I have ½ of one FTE working on the issues of re-entry, that is, the legal problems and barriers of those coming out of prison or jail. In Genesee County alone, that is over 1,000 persons per year. In Michigan we now have about 100,000 persons either incarcerated, or on parole or probation. That does not include the 100's of thousands who have been in prison or jail and are now no longer under the corrections department jurisdiction.

I could talk to you about the legal reasons for banning the box. I can, and will if you want, address the legal requirements of Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. I will do so if asked. Those guidelines allow me to bring lawsuits against larger employers, but frankly, I would rather not. I have too few attorneys for the 250,000 poor persons in my area.

Rather than the legal ramifications, I would like to talk to you about the real and personal reasons for passing this bill. I want to talk to you about my locksmith. He does all of the locks for my law office. He does them for my home. He is a certified safe cracker and works for local banks, doing their safes and safety deposit boxes. He does the locks for the police and sheriff's departments who arrested him. He has felony convictions for marijuana, which he was growing in his barn. Ultimately trustworthy, but he can't even apply at Wal-Mart. Wal-Mart uses the box. My bet is, if Wal-Mart knew he was doing all of the locks and safes for the local bank, the police and sheriff, they might give him a chance. But the box prevents that. The box was used my Michigan Works when he was looking for work assistance.

Another person I know is the best prisoner's rights attorney in all of Michigan. I turn to him for advice because he is the best. His dedication to prisoner's rights came from spending years in prison for first degree murder. Now, for over 20 years, he is the very best lawyer in his field. The Michigan State Bar does not automatically disqualify you if you have a conviction. They investigate, and make a determination on the qualities of the individual as they are now,

in the present. In the last month, I testified before the State Bar of Michigan, on behalf of a law graduate that I wanted to hire as an attorney. In fact, I have hired him; he was admitted to the bar in the last week. He had some indiscretions regarding alcohol in college. Should this prevent him from applying? Giving people the chance to apply makes good sense. Nothing says you have to hire them. But when you know the stories, they have a chance. We put way to many roadblocks in front of those who have been charged or convicted. Give them a chance and recidivism will go down. If you don't let them work, they will commit crimes before they starve.